

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 023597

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION TO SECSTATE JAN 29, 1976 FROM SAN SALVADOR

QUOTE S E C R E T SANSALVADOR 0495

FOR ROGERS FROM AMBASSADOR CAMPBELL

DEPT PLS PASS TO ALL AMERICAN REQUPLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PGOV ES

SUBJ: SALVADORAN PERCEPTION OF THE US

REF: STATE 10605

1. THE COUNTRY TEAM AND I HAVE PUT TOGETHER THE FOLLOWING IMPRESSIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONS POSED IN THE REFTEL. AS I AM SURE IS TRUE OF OTHER POSTS, THE TOPICS YOU RAISE HAVE COME UP MANY TIMES IN RECENT INTERNAL EMBASSY DISCUSSIONS. SIMILARLY, IN OUR OUTSIDE CONTACTS WE FREQUENTLY RUN ACROSS THE SAME THEMES. THE SUBJECT GENERATES THOUGHT, TALK, AND OCASSIONAL DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WITHIN THE MISSION. THIS SHOULD BE EXPECTED WHEN WE DEAL WITH SUBJECTIVE IMPRESSIONS OF THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF SUCH CONTROVERSIAL AND WRENCHING MATIONAL EXPERIENCES AS THE VIETNAM, WAR, WATERGATE, ETAL. THIS CABLE REFLECTS WHAT
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CONSENSUS THERE IS ON THE SUBJECTS.

2. IT WOULD REQUIRE AN INCURABLE OPTIMIST, OR ONE WHO SIMPLY LIKES TO ARGUE, TO DENY THAT THE EVENTS LISTED IN THE REFTEL HAVE,

INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, RESULTED IN SOME DETERIORATION IN THE IMAGE OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE MINDS OF THOSE SALVADORANS WHO FOLLOW WORLD EVENTS. THE EXTENT OF THAT DETERIORATION VARIES A GREAT DEAL DEPENDING ON WHO IS PROFERRING THE ANALYSIS, AND HIS REASONS FOR DOING SO. IT IS MORE DIFFICULT YET TO DIVINE IF ANYONE'S BEHAVIOR HAS BEEN ALTERED AS A RESULT OF SUCH A PERCEIVED LESSENING OF US PRESTIGE OR POWER. IT MUST BE KEPT IN MIND WHEN READING OUR IMPRESSIONS THAT, HOWEVER IT IS SLICED OR MEASURED WHAT REMAINS OF US POWER AND PRESTIGE ASSURES US TOP SPOT ON WHATEVER LIST MIGHT BE COMPILED FROM THE HOST COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE OF OTHER NATIONS' STRENGTHS, AND THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE US AND NUMBER TWO REMAINS GREAT. THE US CASTS A LARGE SHADOW HERE, ONE THAT CONTINUES TO ECLIPSE ALL OTHERS. WHETHER THE SOVIET UNION IS NOW THE GREATER FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN ANGOLA, OR CHINA HAS REPLACED THE US AS THE DOMINANT EXTERNAL POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, IS OF MINIMAL IMPORTANCE TO EL SALVADOR, PARTICULARLY IN THE PROCESS OF MAKING DAY TO DAY DECISIONS AFFECTING ITS ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL TIES TO THE US.

3. OUR COMMENTS ON YOUR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, IN ORDER:

(A) THE ANSWER TO THIS CONTAINED IN THE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS AND SCATTERED THROUGH THE ANSWERS TO B THROUGH J.

(B) NOT IN ANY MEANINGFUL SENSE. SALVADORANS WHO PAY ATTENTION AND ANALYZE SUCH FAR OFF EVENTS WERE ALWAYS SOMEWHAT MYSTIFIED AS TO WHY THE US WAS POURING SO MUCH INTO SUCH A REMOTE CORNER OF THE WORLD WHILE PAYING FAR LESS ATTENTION TO EVENTS CLOSER TO HOME. FURTHERMORE, THEY ARE NOT CONCERNED ABOUT OUR DEFENSE COMMITMENTS TO EL SALVADOR PER SE. SALVADORANS IN GENERAL AND THE GOES IN PARTICULAR, RESENTED THE DISTRACTIVE NATURE OF THE VIETNAM WAR FOR THE US. THEIR FIRST REACTION WHEN IT ENDED WAS THAT NOW, HOPEFULLY, WE WOULD REDIRECT OUR ATTENTION AND EFFORTS TO HEMISPHERIC PROBLEMS. THEY ARE STILL AWAITING EVIDENCE OF THAT REDIRECTION.

THE LOCAL PERCEPTION WOULD BE THAT IN VIETNAM THE US FINALLY PAID THE PRICE OF TRYING TO JUGGLE TOO MANY BALLS AT ONCE, OF SPREADING OURSELVES TOO THIN IN AREAS OF QUESTIONABLE IMPORTANCE.

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THE GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR, WORKING WITH EXTREMELY LIMITED RESOURCES, IS VERY PRAGMATIC IN ITS CHOICE OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY OBJECTIVES. IT LIMITS ITSELF TO ONE OR TWO MAJOR POLICY GOALS, EACH OF WHICH MUST MEET TESTS OF NATIONAL INTEREST AND KNOWN COSTS. GOES OFFICIALS FIND IT DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND THAT OTHER NATIONS, INCLUDING THE US, DO NOT WORK WITH SIMILAR RESTRICTIONS. THAT THE US FAILED TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVE IN VIETNAM, I.E., "LOST THE WAR", WHILE COMING AS A SURPRISE TO THOSE WHO ACCEPTED THE BELIEF THAT WE WERE OMNIPOTENT, WAS NOT PERCEIVED AS PROOF THAT WE DIDN'T LIVE UP TO OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS. RATHER THE OPPOSITE, THAT WE DIDN'T KNOW WHEN TO WITHDRAW DESPITE COMMITMENTS. FAITHFULLY TRYING TO LIVE

UP TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF A TREATY IN CONTRADICTION TO YOUR OWN
BEST INTERESTS, SIMPLY DOES NOT MAKE SENSE TO A SALVADORAN.

(C) (D) THERE ARE ELEMENTS WITHIN THE HOST GOVERNMENT
PRINCIPALLY THOSE WHO MIGHT HAVE STUDIED AND/OR WORKED IN THE
UNITED STATES, WITH SOME KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURE AND COMPLEXITIES
OF THE US POLITICAL PROCESS, INCLUDING THE DOCTRINE OF SEPARATION
OF POWERS, CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT, ETC. THIS KNOWLEDGE IS NOT
WIDESPREAD NOR DOES IT TRANSLATE INTO MEANINGFUL UNDERSTANDING
OR APPRECIATION OF WHAT IS TAKING PLACE BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND
WHITE HOUSE. THE DOMESTIC US DEBATE THAT PRECEDED OUR WITHDRAWAL
FROM VIETNAM WAS NOT SEEN, AT THIS DISTANCE AND WITH A RELATIVELY
LOW LOCAL AWARENESS OF HOW THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM WORKS, AS
THE DEVISIVE AND DEBILITATING EXPERIENCE PERCEIVED BY MANY
AMERICANS. A LACK OF EXPOSURE TO THE US SYSTEM, OR COMPARABLE
EXPERIENCE IN A SIMILAR OPEN SYSTEM, TRANSLATED INTO LIMITED
APPRECIATION OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING DURING THE WATERGATE, DOMESTIC
CIA ACTIVITIES, AND OTHER INTERNAL REVELATIONS AND INVESTIGATIONS,
OR THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MORE RECENT CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE
US EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES. SALVADORANS COULD
UNDERSTAND THE REMOVAL FROM OFFICE OF A SITTING PRESIDENT,
FOR SUCH IS WITHIN THEIR EXPERIENCE. BUT THE TRUE NATURE OF
THE PRESSURES - LEGAL, PUBLIC, PRESS, ETC. - THAT FORCED
RICHARD NIXON TO RESIGN ARE ONLY DIMLY PERCEIVED BY EVEN THE
BEST READ SALVADORANS. HENCE, WATERGATE WAS NOT INTERPRETED AS
INDICATIVE OF WEAKNESS OR FAILURE NOR REFLECTIVE OF A DIMINUTION
OF THE POWER OF THE US. ON THE OTHER HAND, SALVADORANS WERE
NOT PARTICULARLY CONSCIOUS OF THE OUTCOME AS EVIDENCE OF
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THE SELF-CORRECTIVE STRENGTH OF THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM. NOR DID
WATERGATE PRODUCE THE FEELING THAT THE EXECUTIVE WOULD NOW DEAL IN
ANY DIFFERENT WAY FROM HOW HE HAD IN THE PAST IN PURSUIT OF
POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA. SIMILARLY, IT DID NOT AFFECT SALVADOR'S
WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH THE US OR DEPEND ON OUR
COMMITMENTS.

(E) NEITHER I NOR THE COUNTRY TEAM PERCEIVE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES
IN SALVADOR'S TRADITIONAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE US. DURING THE
PAST YEAR, DESPITE BEING THE OBJECT OF HEAVY PRESSURES TO GO
WITH THE THIRD WORLD, AND IN ONE CASE DESPITE DAMAGE TO ONE OF ITS
OWN NATIONAL FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES, EL SALVADOR ESSENTIALLY
DELIVERED ITS VOTE TO US ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION ISSUES
T

AT WE SAID WERE OF IMPORTANCE TO US. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT
THE GOES WOULD NOT, ON CERTAIN ISSUES, GO IN ANOTHER DIRECTION.
IF THE ISSUE INVOLVES LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY, THE NEED TO
DISPLAY TOGETHERNESS WITH A FELLOW CENTRAL AMERICAN
REPUBLIC, OR THIRD WORLD VS FIRST WORLD ECONOMIC ISSUES, EL
SALVADOR WOULD, EVEN IF PUSHED TO THE WALL, PROBABLY VOTE AGAINST
US. THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN TRUE. THE GOES ESSENTIALLY ENJOYS
ITS GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US, AND WOULD PREFER TO PERCEIVE

ITS ROLE AS SUPPORTIVE OF US FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES. IT WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO AVOID GETTING BETWEEN THE US AND PANAMA ON THE CANAL TREATY ISSUE, AND THE US AND GUATEMALA ON BELIZE.

(F) THE SITUATION IN ANGOLA HAS GENERATED LIMITED INTEREST AND COMMENT IN EL SALVADOR. THIS INCLUDES ANALYSIS OF THE CUBAN INTERVENTION. THE GOES HAS SEEN NO NEED TO REEVALUATE ITS COOL ATTITUDE TOWARD CUBA SINCE ANGOLA HIT THE FRONT PAGES. PERHAPS IF THE VOTE TO LIFT THE OAS SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBAS WERE TO BE HELD TODAY, THE GOES WOULD REEVALUATE ITS FAVORABLE VOTE. BUT UNLESS AND UNTIL THE GOES IS FORCED TO ADDRESS SUCH FAR OFF ISSUES IT WILL NOT DO SO. OUR REACTION TO CUBA'S INVOLVEMENT HAS NOT PERCEPTIBLY AFFECTED SALVADOR'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE US SO FAR.

(G) THE GOES ATTITUDE TOWARD DEALING COLLECTIVELY WITH THE US AS OPPOSED TO BILATERALLY IS THAT IT WILL RESORT TO THE FORMER ONLY WHEN IT PERCEIVES GREAT ADVANTAGES IN DOING SO. NORMALLY ON BILATERAL ISSUES OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO EL SALVADOR, THE GOES
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WILL COME DIRECTLY TO US. INDEED, WE HAVE HAD RECENT FEELERS FROM THE GOES THAT IT MIGHT WELCOME A CLIENT STATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US IN RETURN FOR ESPECIALLY FAVORABLE ECONOMIC TREATMENT AND POLITICAL SUPPORT.

(H) "CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE US" ARE NOT HAVING SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON GOES VOTES IN THE UN OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORUMS. ALTHOUGH DIRECTIONAL CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE, MOST INVOLVE ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL MATTERS AND HAVE COME ABOUT FOR OTHER REASONS. ON THE OTHER HAND THE GOES IS PROBABLY LESS CONCERNED THAT BEFORE ABOUT CHARGING THE US BY THE WAY IT VOTES, SINCE IT SEES OTHERS DOING IT WITH SEEMING IMPUNITY.

(I) NO, SALVADOR IS NOT TURNING TO ANOTHER NATION TO REPLACE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. SALVADOR IS NOT A "CRITICAL" MATERIAL PRODUCER AND TRADITIONALLY SELLS ITS PRODUCTS WHERE IT CAN GET THE BEST DEAL. THE SAME IS TRUE FOR ITS IMPORT PURCHASES.

(J) THE HOST GOVERNMENT'S PERCEPTION OF OUR WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO MEET THE NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF THE DEVELOPING NATIONS HAS NOT CHANGED AS A RESULT OF RECENT EVENTS. THE GOES WOULD UNDERSTAND, AND APPLAUD, ANY US DECISION TO REDISTRIBUTE OUR AID TO REWARD FRIENDLY COUNTRIES, AND PROBABLY SANCTION NATIONS VOTING AGAINST US ON ISSUES OF VITAL IMPORTANCE. SECRETARY KISSINGER'S

UN SPEECH OF SEPTEMBER 1, 1975 WAS WELL RECEIVED HERE. WE DO HAVE SOME TRADITIONAL FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES ON ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING THE GOES. OBVIOUSLY THE CONCERNS OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD ARE SHARED BY THOSE IN THE GOES WHO DEAL WITH FOREIGN COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER, FOREIGN INVESTMENT, ETC. THEY ARE

MOSTLY GOVERNMENT TECHNICIANS. THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF
THE COUNTRY IS LESS AWARE OF THESE ISSUES, AND MORE PRONE TO
RELY ON EL SALVADOR'S TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIP , ALBEIT A VERY
JUNIOR PARTNERSHIP, WITH THE US.
CAMPBELL

UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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